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Date: Mon, June 22, 2009 2:22:15 PM
Subject: News from the SEC Annual Meeting 2009



SEC Annual Meeting

*Newsletter from the Conference Minister
of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ*

Special Edition

June 2009

Dear Mike,

June 11th through the 13th the Southeast Conference gathered for our Annual Meeting at Sandy Springs Christian Church, in Sandy Springs, GA. Vanessa Robbs, Conference Moderator remarked, "If this wasn't the best annual meeting we have had, I would be surprised!" Nancy Chorpenning, a member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta said, "I am writing a letter to everyone in my congregations who wasn't here to tell them that they missed an incredible meeting." The hospitality of Sandy Springs Christian Church, and their staff was outstanding. The workshops, worship, and lectures all converged to lift up the theme "transforming churches, transforming lives". This was our first "online" annual meeting. The Annual Reports of the Conference are available to you at the Southeast Conference website. Go here to see them: <http://www.secucc.org/about/Annual%20Meeting%202009/reports.php>



Within the week we will have the worship services, the keynote addresses and the highlights of the business meeting posted as videos on www.secucc.org so if you were not with us or you were and want to relive it, you can see them.

The highlights of the meeting were:

- Celebrating the tenth anniversary of Theology Among the People, a program that has transformed the lives of hundreds of leaders across the Conference
- Welcoming special guests from other settings of the United Church of Christ; Steve Stern, Acting Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries of the UCC, Alice Hunt, newly elected President of Chicago Theological Seminary, Ava Blackwell, Director of Admissions of Lancaster Theological Seminary, Phyllis Byrd, Global Partner Missionary to Kenya, and Mary Seymour of the Cornerstone Fund.
- A vote to proceed with a campaign to sustain and expand the mission and ministry of the conference, accepting a minimum goal of \$1.4 million and a challenge goal of \$3.8 million.

- A recognition of the great generosity of our congregations as we celebrated our Covenant Keepers (10% of operating budget to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) Basic support) our Strive to Tithers (accepting and working toward a goal of being a Covenant Keeper Congregation), and 5for5'ers (congregations that give to all the offerings of the UCC).
- Lifting up and celebrating our ecumenical partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with Sandy Springs pastor Phil Price, and the moderator of the Georgia Region of the Christian Church, Milton West
- Welcoming two Atlanta area congregations which are exploring affiliation with the United Church of Christ; Tabernacle Baptist Church, and All Saints Christ Church United.

It was a delight to be with all who gathered, and it remains for me a deep joy and profound honor to serve you with a staff and leadership of immense gifts.

Peace,
 Tim Downs
Timothy C. Downs
 Conference Minister

**Conference Votes 70 to 1 to Proceed with a Campaign to Sustain
 and Expand the Mission and Ministry
 of the Conference**

At the business meeting of the Conference on Saturday, June 13, the gathered delegates voted by 70 to 1 with 4 abstentions to proceed with a special campaign to expand the mission and witness of the Conference. Opening with a PowerPoint presentation powerfully narrated by Rev. Susan Mitchell, the delegates voted for an effort that will reach into the life of every church in the Conference. The Campaign has three essential parts. First, it will build community and covenant. We will develop our capacity technologically and in other ways to communicate more effective with one another and across all settings of the United Church of Christ. We envision TAP becoming more present on line, web conferencing used regularly, and the training of leaders being made more available to each church. Second, it will build leaders. Our churches need trained and dynamic leadership in both pews and pulpits. Building on the successes of the TAP program we will expand to create training for clergy and multiple models to prepare people for ordained and licensed ministry. Finally, it will build churches. We will develop an outreach to churches in all stages of their development from new starts to establish to equip and support them for vital and faithful ministry.

This campaign commitment was preceded by several years of planning, including, in the last year a rigorous process of reflection, feedback from 55 individual leaders, and over 100 leaders and ministers who gathered in five regional meeting over the course of the spring. Given all of this input, the purposes of the campaign have been reshaped, and we believe will bring us into a promising future.

TAP Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

On Thursday, June 11, TAP participants, those currently enrolled, graduates, and those preparing to graduate and their families gathered for a commencement banquet and worship service. We celebrated ten years of a program that has transformed the ministries of our congregations of all sizes, from the smallest to the largest. Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark shared a PowerPoint that spanned the years and noted that throughout its history, the TAP program has kept the people at its center.

Alice Hunt, President of Chicago Theological Seminary spoke during dinner reminding us that "we are all theologians", and that the purpose of programs like TAP is to remind us to continue to



stimulate our thinking and get us beyond the tendency to have "second grade answers to second grade questions."

Following dinner we continued with a worship service and ceremony for fourteen TAP graduates. From Victory Church in Stone Mountain there were 10 graduates, from Holy Trinity Community UCC in Nashville, two, from Howard Congregational UCC, Nashville, one, and one from the Bet Haverim Congregation in Atlanta. Dr. Donna Allen, of Lancaster Theological Seminary was the preacher, inviting us to live according to "God's agenda", an invitation from God to servant leadership as a people of justice, love and liberation. Faith is "not about a personal savior in Jesus Christ, not about you, it is about God and God's need for those who will serve the divine agenda.



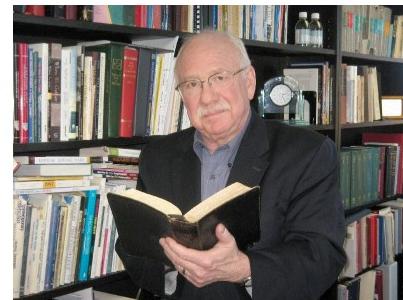
Today there are six TAP groups across the Southeast Conference, and TAP has trained well over 100 people for ministry. Virtually all of the licensed ministers of the Conference have been trained in TAP, and several TAP students have gone on to seminary.

Friday Keynotes and Workshops Highlight the Themes of Transformation

Our keynoters, Steve Sterner, Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries and Donna Allen of Lancaster Seminary, both lifted up themes of transforming congregations in their keynotes. Steve noted that 90% of efforts to change churches fail because their processes are inadequate to meet the resistance that inevitably rises in the face of change. He spoke about cultivating ownership on the part of leaders, and the need for celebration, noting that the UCC is known for its "terminal earnestness". Steve said that above all, "unless everything is driven to serve Jesus, nothing else matters". Donna Allen spoke of the centrality of worship education and developing community in the course of transforming a congregation. She noted that "dirty words" to this generation are "tradition", "church", "rules". Congregational transformation must lead with innovation and courage. Both full addresses will be available on the Southeast Conference web site within the week.

Reflections from Tim Downs, Conference Minister

On Saturday June 12th, in preparation for the Annual Meeting the Board of Directors of the Conference met to finalize details. They welcomed Steve Sterner of Local Church Ministries, who, 15 years ago had been active in the Southeast Conference in his capacity as Senior Pastor of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta. Steve reflected to the Board that this conference has made a long and wonderful journey from those contentious days. He noted with thanks the collaboration of this Conference with the national setting of the UCC, and said "while as the third smallest conference in the UCC you may not be remarkable for your OCWM giving, you are remarkable in another way. You have given a disproportionate share of leadership to the denomination. Thank you."



I looked around the room and considered the role of our exceptional staff in the national setting. Cameron Trimble is a key leader in the shaping of the future of new church development in the UCC, and is retained half time by LCM for that purpose. Kathy Clark has developed TAP into a leading and highly acclaimed model of formation of all lay and clergy for effective ministry. Our representatives to covenanted ministries, most notably Gary Myers who has served on the Board of Wider Church Ministries, Elizabeth Clement, on the Office of General Ministries, and Dorinda Broadnax on Executive Council have each been noteworthy leaders. Gerri Ryons-Hudson has served as president of the UCC Office Support Staff Network, and been a voice of the Southern Region to the Pension Boards. I could name many others, in both pulpits and pews of the Southeast who people have remarked on. We are a Conference of leaders.

This year we have seen our congregations step forward to our time of financial challenge, and some have increased their giving to OCWM even while their budgets have declined. Our Board initiated the Friends of the Conference Fund with pledges of over \$13,000, and we are confident that there are many other leaders who will step forward with generosity as the Fund continues to reach out to others. The overwhelming vote to support the campaign to support and extend the mission and ministry of the Conference is yet another sign that together we recognize that we serve in a region that is hungry to be transformed by a gospel of welcome, justice and empowerment, a gospel which reaches into the very margins to gather us into the beloved community.

We are a people touched and moved by the call to mission. At our Annual Meeting we announced that the work camp to be held for Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS has recruited 22 so far of the 40 slots available, six of whom come from one of our newest and most rapidly growing congregations, Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville. Many of you welcomed Phyllis Byrd into your churches in May and June. Phyllis serves the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Kenya as a theological educator, and has been itinerating throughout the Southeast Conference to a very warm welcome from you. No talk of mission would be complete without a mention of Anil Henry in the Christian Hospital in Mungeli, India, who has been generously supported by you, and is a commissioned minister of the Alabama-Tennessee Association. I noted in my comments to the Conference that the church which was hosting us, Sandy Springs Christian Church has sent two work groups to Mungeli in support of Dr. Henry recently.

My commitment at the beginning of the year was that we would sustain our level of staffing and expand our programming to equip and support our local churches over the course of 2009. I have every confidence that we will be able to do this. I thank you all for being a people who are bold in ministry, faithful in service, and abundant in the gifts that build a vital and vibrant witness to Jesus Christ.

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